

Message Text

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43

ACTION AF-18

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E. O. 11652: N/ A

TAGS: PINS, TS

SUBJECT: TRIAL OF AHMED BEN SALAH AND HIS BROTHER

REF: TUNIS 3381

1. AFTER TEN HOURS OF DELIBERATION JUNE 19, CRIMINAL COURT GAVE VERDICTS IN CASE OF AHMED BEN SALAH' S ESCAPE FROM PRISON. THREE- DAY TRIAL WAS WELL COVERED BY LOCAL PRESS. DEFENSE MADE CASE THAT RESPONSIBILITY FOR ESCAPE RESTED WITH AHMED BEN SALAH AND THREE OTHERS WHO WERE BEING TRIED IN ABSENTIA, AND NOT WITH EIGHT PEOPLE INCLUDING BEN SLAH' S BROTHER DR. M' HAMED BEN SALAH WHO WERE ARRESTED SHORTLY AFTER ESCAPE. VERDICT GAVE AHMED BEN SALAH PRISON TERM OF FIVE YEAR SIX MONTHS. (PRESUMABLY IN ADDITION TO APPROXIMATELY SEVEN YEARS REMAINING IN HIS ORIGINAL TE N- YEAR TERM). OTHER THREE TRIED IN ABSENTIA RECEIVED FINES AND PRISON TERMS OF APPROXIMATELY TEN YEARS EACH. DR. BE SALAH RECEIVED 500- DINAR FINE AND THREE YEARS IN PRISON. OTHER SEVEN ACCUSED RECEIVED SIMILAR OR LIGHTER SENTENCES.

2. COMMENT: MUCH HARSHER SENTENCES FOR FOUR MEN TRIED IN ABSENTIA AS OPPOSED TO EIGHT ACTUALLY UNDER ARREST SHOWS DEFENSE' S CASE THAT ESCAPE LARGELY PLANNED AND CARRIED OUT BY THOSE WHO LEFT COUNTRY MADE IMPRESSION ON COURT. MANY OBSERVERS, HOWEVER, HAD EXPECTED LIGHTER, TOKEN SENTENCES

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(PERHAPS ONE YEAR IN PRISON) FOR DR. BEN SALAH AND OTHERS
UNDER ARREST. LONGER SENTENCES, HOWEVER, GIVE PRESIDENT
BOURGUIBA POSSIBILITY OF MAKING HUMANITARIAN AND POLITICALLY
POPULAR GESTURE BY COMMUTING ALL OR PAR OF SENTENCES.
RELPH

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*** Current Classification *** LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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